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Week of
March 17, 1941

Critics' THEATRE REVIEWS

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†"The Doctor's Dilemma" opened Tuesday, March 11th, at the Shubert Theatre.
†"They Walk Alone" opened Wednesday, March 12th, at the John Golden Theatre.
†"Five Alarm Waltz" opened Thursday, March 13th, at the Playhouse.

THEATRE REVIEWS IS A COMPLETE GUIDE AND RECORD TO THE NEW YORK SHOWS

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NEW YORK POST
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NEW YORK JOURNAL AND AMERICAN

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"Five Alarm Waltz"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, *March 14, 1941*

"Five Alarm Waltz" Is a Woozy Comedy About Playwrights

"Five Alarm Waltz," comedy by Lucille S. Prumbs. Produced by Everett Wile at the Playhouse, New York, March 13, 1941.

★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

IT MAY be, as Lucille S. Prumbs, the author, intimated in one of the lesser lines of her first opus, a comedy called "Five Alarm Waltz," at the Playhouse last night—

It may be that either one or both of her leading characters, they being Broadway playwrights of a fairly unfamiliar type, fittingly typifies "a stink weed in a flower pot." I would be the last to deny it.

They did seem strangely out of place in both the comedy and its setting, which I assume was a pent-house apartment in Sutton Place.

In fact I suspect they would seem strangely out of place anywhere except, perhaps, in another comedy by Lucille S. Prumbs.

Wacky Playwrights

One of the playwrights is an excited young man, referred to frequently as a Bulgarian, who wants to live the free and progressive literary life; to grab his plots and characters from the market places as well as the byways of the world and cause them to live and vibrate in his crude Bulgarian way.

The other playwright is his perpetually startled wife, who married him as an experience, or out of pique or, it may be, on a bet. It is her aim to write for the theatre and the box office and, according to Miss Prumbs, she was doing it with great success until she met the Bulgarian!

They fight a raucous and practically continous fight in defense of their mutual ideals and deficiencies. In the end he writes a hit, and she suffers a failure.

I found nothing of interest in their ambitions, their achievements, or their actions. Nor in any of the ideas of Miss Prumbs, their creator.

Furthermore I am personally convinced that it is a complete, and rather regrettable, waste of time for anyone to try to make a romantic hero out of Elia Kazan.

He has frequently proved himself a character actor of considerable skill. He was an excellent taxi striker in "Waiting for Lefty," and, so far as I am concerned, he has, in a variety of other parts, been playing a recognizable variation of that colorful character ever since.

Not Saroyan

In "Five Alarm Waltz" Mr. Kazan, I am told, is trying to suggest such a playwright as William Saroyan might be if Saroyan were that kind of a playwright.

The suggestion is chiefly physical. This playwright is a congenital stripper. He finds it difficult to work in anything but a pair of baby blue shorts. He drags his characters in from the streets and milks them of their thought, if any.

His shouting is free, his gestures semaphoric, his conclusions empty, his performance more irritating than convincing. Saronoiac, yes; but not, I'm convinced, Saronoyan.

Louise Platt seemed a little mystified and unhappy playing opposite him.

The cast also includes Roman Bohnen, Robert Shayne, Ann Thomas, Howard Freeman, Curt Conway and Helen Zelinskaya. They all seemed a little unhappy.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, *March 14, 1941*

Elia Kazan and 'Five Alarm Waltz' Consider the Problem of a Saroyan Married to a Playwright

By BROOKS ATKINSON

SINCE there are no Saroyan plays on Broadway for the moment, it is only right that we should have a play about Saroyan. Lucille S. Prumbs, author of "Five Alarm Waltz," which was jitterbugged at The Playhouse last evening, does not pretend that her chief character, Adam Boguris, is Saroyan. By marrying Boguris to a successfully modish playwright, she throws all literal bloodhounds off the scent. But Boguris is an American-born Bulgarian, which a Broadway ethnologist might easily confuse with Armenian.

He is also a braggadocio, a lover of humanity and a writer of loosely contrived plays that have something, although nobody knows what. Since "Five Alarm Waltz" is a loosely-contrived play that has something, although not much, the analogy is perfect. Now you see Boguris, now you see Saroyan, but you have to keep your eyes propped well open to see anything but a blurred streak across the stage.

* * *

For it is to be feared that Robert Lewis's direction is bad, and that Elia Kazan's acting in the leading part is bad, also. These are matters worth noting. Mr. Lewis is a good director. His production of "My Heart's in the Highlands" was a minor masterpiece. Mr. Kazan is an excellent actor with a big voice and remarkable energy. He dropped a bomb into the concluding scene of "Waiting for Lefty," and it went off with a loud report. But Mr. Lewis's attempt to whip up "Five Alarm Waltz" into supernatural comedy results in robot acting in which most of the players are driven beyond their capacity and forced to throw their voices into over-drive gear, resulting in some very ugly sounds. His insistence upon motion becomes an obsession. His humors are getting coy.

As for Mr. Kazan, he is getting to be a self-conscious actor with purple patches and many little curlicues on the side. Cast as the mad genius of the play, Mr. Kazan has to act several scenes costumed in a pair of drawers, and it is pleasant to observe that he has a nice little thicket of black curlicues smack in the middle of his chest. Since nature gave him those, he is entitled to them and is herewith handsomely congratulated. But what worries this art lover are the little fancies in his acting style that look as if they had come out of a book. Mr. Kazan's acting in this drama is studiously spontaneous.

"Five Alarm Waltz" proposes an amusing idea. Suppose an undisciplined genius with a flair for fiery particles were married to a fashionable playwright who knows the trick of completing a workmanlike job. Suppose she challenged him to stop bluffing and write a play. Of course, he will turn out to be the better artist of the two. In the meantime he roars around the apartment, bringing up strange characters off the streets to serve as models, studying them like a sculptor, playing "Chop Sticks" on the piano, and behaving outrageously toward every one, including his wife. In the last act there are two or three genuine moments when the characters stop acting and the actors stop acting acting, which is a merciful change. But most of "Five Alarm Waltz" appears to be undeveloped narrative in which things are what they are because the author says so, just for the fun of it.

* * *

As the unfortunate wife Louise Platt is forced to play at a pitch that is beyond her strength. Most of the actors are shrill and overwrought, trying desperately to be funny. But Howard Freeman, as the sophisticated butler, is permitted to be amusing without reaching for his laughs. As a tired producer Roman Bohnen has an intelligible part to play and has found a number of ways to make it slyly satiric. Harry Horner has designed a gaily refulgent apartment in a smart neighborhood, and Helene Pons has done some handsome costuming. As graphic artists, Mr. Horner and Miss Pons enjoy the luxury of giving an impression of animation without screaming, running or turning cartwheels.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, *March 14, 1941*

Five-Alarm Waltz Is Satire of Saroyan

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

THERE is only one Saroyan (praise Allah!) and Saroyan is his prophet—not the author of Five-Alarm Waltz who tried, not without some humor, to confine the bouncing Armenian to the limits of the three-act play that opened last night at the Playhouse.

Many reports, most of them contradictory, have been noised about Broadway regarding the authorship of the new caricature. Official credit is given to one Lucille S. Prumbs, which is obviously a nom de plume or, in this instance, a nom de guerre. It has even been rumored that Miss Prumbs is actually Mr. Saroyan with a shawl over his head, but I don't believe that one. Nor do I believe it was written by George Jean Nathan, and further speculation on this point will get us nowhere.

At any rate Miss Prumbs, hereinafter called the author, having read the newspapers, the magazine articles and the columnists' accounts of Mr. Saroyan's animal spirits and no doubt having been impressed as well by Mr. Saroyan's own evaluation of his genius, has attempted to find out what would happen if he married a beautifully mannered and socially prominent lady playwright and went to live in Sutton Pl. instead of the Great Northern Hotel.

* * *

The idea is amusing—for a paragraph or two—but in Five-Alarm Waltz it becomes three acts of sound and fury, signifying nothing; a bedlam of shouts and epithets and

(Continued on page 360)

"Five Alarm Waltz"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, *March 14, 1941*

'Five Alarm Waltz,' Play About a Playwright, Opens at the Playhouse

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

WE MAY, at a guess, count Miss Lucille S. Prumbs, author of last evening's "Five Alarm Waltz," as one of those haunted by the memory of William Saroyan. Miss Prumbs not only writes a little like Mr. Saroyan but she appears to be writing about Mr. Saroyan. Under these disconcerting circumstances it is well to remember that the rumor that she actually is Mr. Saroyan seems to have been scotched. She is really Miss Prumbs.

She is writing superficially about a bumptious genius named Adam Boguris, a short story writer and poet—and also a Bulgarian, a great lover and a man who likes to work in his underpants. Boguris, married to a conventional playwright of great beauty and remarkable forbearance, decides to write a real play because he loves people so much. In preparation for this task, he brings home a wan, but peppery, young woman who has been making a living by wheeling an empty baby carriage around to advertise a store which sells baby carriages. She, in turn, brings a mad young man, Saroyanesque to the last caper, who makes his living selling sheet music.

There is also a rotund butler who adores genius, a producer with gastric ulcers, a handsome young man who puts on Boguris's play to show Boguris up and a costume designer who is present, as nearly as I can make out, because Miss Prumbs thought it would be fun to have another character. In the end, which seemed to me rather delayed, Mr. and Mrs. Boguris write plays in competition, and if you cannot guess who wins you have not realized how, in spite of everything, Miss Prumbs admires wild, free genius, uninhibited by the neat little rules of neat little people.

Miss Prumbs furthers her plot, and celebrates her hero, with a great rush of words which rarely seem to have much content. It is an oddly windy play, and to me an oddly empty one. Boguris, upon whose essential importance the author stakes her play, emerges as little more than a blustery bore. I yield to several in my admiration for Mr. Saroyan, but if, as so much internal evidence suggests, Miss Prumbs had him in mind when she fashioned Boguris he has cause for complaint. Mr. Saroyan may talk too much, but he is a man of talent. He is not merely a man who shouts himself hoarse and pulls down the living room curtains.

The emptiness of the play can be put squarely up to the author. Elia Kazan plays Boguris with great force and considerable ingenuity and Louise Platt is very lovely as the wife and also plays the part engagingly. Roman Bohnen and Robert Shayne are excellent and Miss Ann Thomas is noticeably amusing as the girl who, in some fashion Miss Prumbs did not make clear, provides the playwright's with a model. A model, as Miss Prumbs has just proved, is not enough.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, *March 14, 1941*

Louise Platt, Elia Kazan In "Five Alarm Waltz"

By JOHN MASON BROWN

AS Mr. Saroyan would be the first to agree, there is only one William Saroyan. Shakespeare, so fortunate in many things, may share initials with him. Even so, there is only one William Saroyan.

It is a pity Lucille S. Prumbs has not realized this. Had she done so, she might have saved herself and a lot of others from last evening's trouble. But she is mistaken enough to believe, just because Mr. Saroyan has established himself unconventionally both as a playwright and a public character, that he will therefore be so gracious as to become a believable character when she uses him as the model from which to draw the playwright who is the hero of her "Five Alarm Waltz."

Mr. Saroyan, however, refuses to surrender his birthright and merge with Adam Boguris. He is too incredible in his own unique rights to gain credibility merely because someone without his gifts decides to write a farce about him. Although he may be in Miss Prumbs's mind, he is not in her play. The fellow who is there is a tiresome boor who is variously and rightly described as being a screwball, a whack, a loony, a Martian invasion, and a form of plant life growing like stinkweed in a flower pot.

Most certainly, Miss Prumbs's dramatist could never have written "My Heart's in the Highlands," "The Time of Your Life," parts of "Love's Old Sweet Song," and those charming youthful sketches which have been brought together in book form under the title of "My Name is Aram." Where Mr. Saroyan can lay, and has laid, claim to high talents, Adam Boguris can only boast bad manners, and an eccentricity and egomania both of which prove deadly. No wonder even an actor so excellent as Elia Kazan can do little or nothing to save such a part from the sleepy fatigue of its would-be prankish overwriting.

My Heart's in the Lowlands

Miss Prumbs's whim is to imagine what would happen if the attractive authoress of several smart comedies (Miss Prumbs goes so far as to liken her to a "female Noel Coward") were married to a man like Mr. Saroyan, and taunted him into writing a play infinitely more probing, more original, and critically successful than her own. It is Louise Platt who wastes her prettiness, her trim slimness, and her charm upon the lady playwright who, as written, is anything but smart.

As a farce, "Five Alarm Waltz" is about as subtle as a pile-driver; as a comedy it is only a little merrier than a funeral parlor. It is a cheap affair, shoddy in its dramaturgy, improbable in its situation, uninteresting in its writing, feeble in its characterization, and unfumigated in its poor attempts at humor.

No. We want our Saroyan straight, or not at all. It is the eccentricities of mind and spirit which matter in a writing man, not his manners. Assuredly, after last night's retreat from pleasure at the Playhouse, we prefer not to have to go around picking up the Prumbs from Saroyan's table.

'FIVE ALARM WALTZ'

A play in three acts by Lucille S. Prumbs; directed by Robert Lewis; setting by Harry Horner; costumes by Helene Pons; presented at the Playhouse on March 13, 1941, by Everett Wile. The cast:

Millicent	Paula Dupont
Brooke March	Louise Platt
Adam Boguris	Elia Kazan
Mme. Constantina	Helen Zelinskaya
Jerry Manning	Robert Shayne
May	Ann Thomas
Theodore	Howard Freeman
Dave Dorham	Roman Bohnen
Young Man	Curt Conway
Boy	Harold Lui

Reprinted from
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
March 14, 1941

'Five Alarm Waltz' Is A False Alarm On Saroyan

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

I DON'T think I'm exactly going out on a limb when I announce that the hero of last night's play is modeled on William Saroyan. There are tell-tale little touches about Miss Prumb's Adam Borguris—such as the way he behaves for three whole acts—which lend a certain weight to the theory. It's Mr. Saroyan as legend and his best friends describe him except that in the play he's been given a wife.

Conceivably there's a very entertaining play in Mr. Saroyan, but last night's, I'm afraid, is not it. Miss Prumbs has a knack for batting out funny lines, and on some other occasion she may very well write a funny play. But the rollicking burlesque she intended in *Five Alarm Waltz* is too often merely noisy and tiresome. The chief trouble is just what's the trouble with some of Saroyan's own plays: too much Saroyan and too little plot. Her hero's bellowing and leaping and orating and clowning are better clues to his identity than they are proofs of his engagingness; and as he had run through his repertoire inside the first half-hour, I found him—even though portrayed by that excellent actor Elia Kazan—a good deal of a nuisance for the rest of the evening. He had, for me, a kind of many-sided monotony; while the warmer qualities in Saroyan, which might have contributed to a real portrait, were jigged up for a caricature.

What story there is tells how the cocksure Boguris, married to a sort of female Noel Coward, decides to show her up by writing a play himself. In the face of everybody's jeers, he crashes through magnificently and, when the curtain falls, is in line for the Pulitzer Prize. The plot, I fear, is more historical than breath-taking.

Miss Prumbs rounds things out with some other comedy characters. The only one I found very amusing was a girl whom the great-hearted Boguris picks off the street to serve as a model for his heroine.

Mr. Kazan went at the part of the great man with gusto, playing it for all it was worth and giving it a kind of wacky force; but he couldn't save the day. Ann Thomas was amusing as the pick-up and Roman Bohnen got everything possible out of the role of a commercial producer with ulcers. The rest of the cast ranged from all right to all wrong.

I await with interest Mr. Saroyan's play about Miss Prumbs.

"Five Alarm Waltz"

Reprinted from NEW YORK JOURNAL AND AMERICAN, *March 14, 1941*

'Five Alarm Waltz' Staged at Playhouse

Private Lives of Two Dramatists Give Play Its Theme; First Nighters See Resemblance to Real Persons

By JOHN ANDERSON

THOUGH the private lives of playwrights are, I trust, more entertaining than the average play, the two authors whose troubles with art and marriage make up "Five Alarm Waltz" at the Playhouse are stormy and eccentric but uninteresting. As the creations of Lucille S. Prumbs they seem vaguely borrowed from life, not to say Time and Fortune and the lobby talk had it that the chief characters were copied after Clare Boothe and William Saroyan.

If they are, they are not only poor copies, but everyone knows that the briHiant Miss Boothe is married to Mr. Luce, and that Mr. Saroyan is wedded to his art.

But Miss Prumbs is wondering in her play what would happen if a lady dramatist of social position, wit, beauty, and success were the wife of an untidy Bulgarian exhibitionist anxious to proclaim his genius to the world. How would his proletarian passions manage in a Sutton Place penthouse, and how would her patrician nervous system react to his bare Bulgar back as he composed masterpieces all over the modernistic furniture clad only in a pair of blue shorts?

Given the situation and Miss Prumbs virtually gives it right back. While she has written three noisy acts about the couple she hasn't done much with them beyond the conventional cat-and-dog fight of slapstick Broadway matrimony. With his cosmic understanding the Bulgarian egoist, Adam Boguris, sneers at his wife's handsome box office successes, and she taunts him to write a better play, if he can. With that remark you can consider the plot laid. Boguris sets out to show her.

With the help of some girl he finds in the streets he begins work on his great drama. She is, he says, the image of Sheba; of yesterday and tomorrow and he will make the playhouse live for men who sweat at their work and love and die, and so on, and so forth, for all the usual eloquent etceteras.

Jerry Appears

Then appears Jerry Manning the gentleman who wanted to marry Brooke March before she fell under the spell of the great Boguris. He and Miss March's costumier conspire to produce Boguris' play so that his ego may be deflated for once and for all by its failure, thereby leaving Miss March free to marry Mr. Manning. Mr. Manning, it seems, was no small chance to pass up, since Miss Prumbs identifies him as a publisher with two floors in Rockefeller Center.

Then Boguris' play was produced and two nights later Miss March's opened and guess what? Surprise, surprise, the critics hailed Boguris and said Miss March ought to take lessons in playwrighting from her husband. It seemed that the critics didn't agree on what Boguris was talking about but they thought he was wonderful, all the same. At the end, the pair had resumed their marriage, and were quarrelling over a Chinese child refugee Boguris had brought home with him.

Ah, me! These artists! These temperaments! Except for the impudent suggestion of living persons Miss Prumbs might as well have cut her people out of the usual stencils and propped them up with pasteboard. They are nothing and prove nothing. Her play is all surface and no insides. She seemed no nearer her characters than I was, sitting in the third row.

Kazan's Acting

By the sheer dynamic force of his acting, Elia Kazan does manage to give Boguris some dimension. He does so, I will admit, by going beyond the strict and fastidious limits of his usual playing but I suppose he saw it was sink or swim and shot the works.

If he couldn't rescue the character he could at least make a mighty splash, and his performance is certainly that—energetically and magnetically that. The lovely Louise Platt fares not so well, because the part has no more substance than tissue paper.

In the same bravura desperation of Mr. Kazan, Miss Zelinskaya whoops up the character of the scheming costumier, but it is a thankless job, and Mr. Bohnen's meticulous sense of comedy is jettisoned in a general attempt to keep the thing afloat.

Howard Freeman's butler is the only genuinely comical creation of a quietly anaesthetic evening, whose ineptitude in writing forced the adroit Mr. Lewis into some fairly clumsy direction.

Harry Horner's penthouse scene seemed almost pleasant enough to dwell in—or even to have a play in, if we had the play.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, *March 14, 1941*

Portrait of a Playwright

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

THERE were advance reports that the new play called "Five Alarm Waltz" would deal with the frightening subject of what might have happened had William Saroyan married Clare Boothe. Let me immediately set your panicky fears at rest. The comedy by Lucille S. Prumbs has as one of its central characters a figure that might be intended as a portrait of Mr. Saroyan, but the other main personage of the work is too mild, conventional and generally undistinguished a lady ever to be taken as even the dimmest sort of carbon copy of the vivid Miss Boothe. The result is that "Five Alarm Waltz" is the story of a fairly believable and recognizable hero indulging in love and rivalry with a stock figure.

* * *

Those who know Mr. Saroyan better than I do must tell you whether the portrait drawn by Miss Prumbs is accurate in its details. All I can attest to is that, as played by the excellent Elia Kazan, the eccentric playwright of "Five Alarm Waltz" is at times amusing and more frequently boring, and that, in my estimation, such antics as most of those in which he indulges would be more likely to result in a play by Lucille S. Prumbs than one by William Saroyan. A studiously picturesque and free-spirited fellow, this Adam Boguris, as he is called, is given to being critical of writers of talent and, upon being taunted by his successful playwright wife to prove he could write a better play than she can, proceeds to do so. Meanwhile such quaint characters as a literary butler, a highly moral girl from the streets, and a vendor of sidewalk songs dart about supplying Boguris with inspiration.

Although the new comedy seems to me more strenuous and determined than amusing, there is an undoubted strain of talent in this Miss Prumbs. It is undisciplined, intermittent and laborious, but it reveals itself in a number of fresh and lively moments, good bits of comic invention and occasional passages of effective writing. The playwright-wife is clumsily drawn, the slight narrative is weakly handled, and much of what is intended as hilarity turns out to be merely noisy, but there is enough that is good in the work to suggest that here we have another promising playwright. Nevertheless, I am certainly not recommending the new play to you. It is, I think, an entirely unsuccessful comedy, despite its incidental pleasures, and I limit my few words of encouragement to Miss Prumbs's future, not to that of her current work.

* * *

Mr. Kazan, who is one of the most vital and dynamic of our actors, plays with his customary effectiveness, and even succeeds in convincing you from time to time that this Adam Boguris might be a man of important talent. Miss Louise Platt, as the wife, has an entirely stock role as the wife and she deserves much credit for making so dull and stuffy a part as credible as she does. There is a particularly good performance by Miss Ann Thomas as the bewildered girl the playwright uses for inspiration, and most of the best sections of the play come when Miss Thomas is performing effectively. Robert Shayne, one of the stage's better leading men, plays the heroine's discarded lover pleasantly, and Howard Freeman gets some comedy out of the role of the theater-loving butler, while Curt Conway comes on for a good bit. Then, there is an engaging little Chinese boy named Harold Lui, who contributes helpfully for a few moments. But "Five Alarm Waltz" isn't enough fun.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM

(Continued from page 358)

sometimes of blatant vulgarity. It adds nothing to the Saroyan legend or to the current theatrical season.

Saroyan's name, of course, is not in the author's cast of characters, but the identity of Adam Boguris is transparently veiled, and Miss Prumbs does him the further disservice of making him a Bulgarian.

Elia Kazan plays the role of the genius with boundless energy. He is as cocksure and self-confident as Saroyan ever was in one of his letters of self-praise to his editors. But in obedience to the script he makes the character physically rather than mentally energetic. The real Saroyan does not do any monkey-shines on the chandeliers. His flying trapeze is a noiseless typewriter, and it is on that machine that he works off his surplus vitality rather than by throwing furniture around. He bellows in print rather than in conversation.

It is not, however, Mr. Kazan's fault that the part was written that way, nor is it the fault of Louise Platt (a beautiful gift from Hollywood) that the author made the role of Mrs. Boguris so vague and cloudy. Miss Platt plays prettily, but cannot go beyond the fuzzy outlines of the character.

Miss Prumbs, if that is the name, does rather better with the character of the soulful butler engaged by Boguris to keep his house and his mind in a semblance of order, and Howard Freeman adds his own touch of brightness to the part. His ministrations to the Master were, in fact, more amusing than the Master's neurotic activities.

* * *

Ann Thomas entered into the rowdy spirit of the play whole-heartedly as a tough little nitwit introduced into the crazy menage for "color," but in her attempt to maintain the burlesque tempo she was forced, I thought, to some injudicious overacting. Roman Bohnen contributed a skilful portrayal of a cautious producer, and Helen Zelinskaya made a vivid couturiere.

Five-Alarm Waltz has many laughs in it, but most of them come from its lapses into vaudeville or burlesque. The truth is that Mr. Saroyan has not yet become an institution worthy of the dignity and honor of having a three-act satire written about him. He is too young. Nor is Lucille S. Prumbs, whoever she may be, the one to write it when and if the time ever comes.

"They Walk Alone"

Reprinted from NEW YORK JOURNAL AND AMERICAN, *March 13, 1941*

'They Walk Alone' Presented at the Golden

Elsa Lanchester Portrays an English Murderess Who Is Fond of Playing the Organ at Midnight

By JOHN ANDERSON

MISS ELSA LANCHESTER (Mrs. Charles Laughton) seemed to have the best time of anybody at the Golden Theatre last night up there on the stage making one face after another, and sometimes several at once, while portraying a batty English murderess who was fond of the organ, in a foolish and dreary murder yarn by Max Catto called "They Walk Alone."

Before slaughtering the young men of the cast Emmy Baudine (Miss Lanchester) would step next door to the chapel and wham away on the organ at midnight, get her victim and pop back into her bed in time to get breakfast for the Tallents the next morning. As their housemaid she worked, the organ and homicidal mania as sidelines, strictly on her own time.

It was quite a while before the Tallents connected the weird organ recitals with the bumping off of the youths of the village and they caught on just when they were down to the last few members of the cast. In their own way the Tallents seemed as strange as Emmy and not quite bright. If they were actually living in England now someone would probably have to call their attention to the war and phone them about the air raids.

But Emmy was a caution. I do not know what department of Kraft-Ebbing she belongs in, but as Miss Lanchester plays her she seems an improbable and tiresome maniac, haywired for sound. Though the play belongs vaguely to the "Criminal at Large" and "Night Must Fall" school it is neither blood, nor good thick grease paint relative but a silly and rambling bore.

Faulty Acting

I doubt if the fault lies as much in the writing as it does in the acting and direction. The dialogue lacks flavor and the scene plotting is, in spots, pretty inept but I suspect that the chief problem was to make the audience accept Emmy, as the Tallents did, as a nice, normal, efficient housemaid, a sort of Karloff-again-on again, and then give way to boggling horror as the evidence of her peculiar midnight doings reached a climax.

But actually Miss Lanchester indicates almost at the outset that she is eerily deranged, and only a collection of half-wits would have failed to suspect her of something. It is, I think, the greatest piece of over-acting that the local stage has seen since the late Frank Vosper tossed his expression around so prodigally in another English murder mystery some years ago.

Viertel Director

As director, Mr. Viertel has not only failed to keep the performance within reasonable bounds, but missed completely the atmosphere of tension and the tempo of terror that such a play must have above everything else. It is a pity to waste the admirably suggestive setting of Lemuel Ayers on such inept stuff.

On such a wind-swept moor, in the dark crannies of the rambling room it would seem to be just the place where Miss Flora Robson, for instance, could seal someone up handsomely in the great chimney piece or Emlyn Williams scare the daylights out of everybody.

As it is they might as well seal the play in, for as Mr. Irving Hoffman sagely remarked, the goose-flesh hangs high at the Golden, and quite out of reach.

'THEY WALK ALONE'

A play in three acts by Max Catto; directed by Berthold Viertel; setting by Lemuel Ayers; presented at the John Golden Theater on March 12, 1941, by Ben A. Boyar. The cast:

Julie Tallent.....Olive Deering
Bess Stanforth.....Carol Goodner
Robert Stanforth.....John Moore
Mr. Tallent.....A. P. Kaye
Larry Tallent.....Martin Manulis
Emmy Baudine.....Elsa Lanchester
Saul Trevithick.....Erford Gage

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, *March 13, 1941*

"They Walk Alone" Is a Drama Of the Shiver and Shake Series

"They Walk Alone," drama by Max Catto. Produced by Ben A. Boyar at the John Golden Theatre, New York, March 12, 1941.

★ ★+

By BURNS MANTLE

I WOULDN'T know what really is wrong with the heroine of "They Walk Alone," who moved into the John Golden Theatre last night. If I did I have an idea I could not make it plain to you in the clean columns of this tidy journal, being weak in my command of psychological terminology.

But mad she is, and mad she will be for the rest of the engagement, unless the outraged country folk who captured her in the organ loft of a neighboring off-stage church in Lincolnshire last night made way with her.

The refusal of a dramatist to be honest with his audience in these matters is, I think, a little silly. Not only does it deny his play a chance for the greater success that promises a sizable run, but it reveals his own technical ineptness.

This particular heroine is Emmy Baudine, a sometimes wild-eyed young servant girl who hails from Cornwall and takes a place as maid on the farm of the Stanforths.

A Moody Lass

From the beginning her actions are a bit on the strange side. She is moody to a degree, a sort of Jekyll-Hyde personality in skirts. Organ music will set her off in no time.

Hardly is she settled in the house before the organ begins to play and the men folk begin to suffer repressed convulsions of sex attraction. The Stanforth women resent these manifestations, but curiously do little about them.

Because, I suspect, if the older of them, who is mistress of the farm, had acted as any sane woman similarly situated and with her suspicions would have acted, Emmy would have been packed off the day after she arrived and there would have been no play.

As it is she stays on, and soon the neighbors begin to find their youngest and strongest young men murdered on the moors and in their haylofts. Murdered and rather horribly cut up, I gathered.

It is seven weeks before the men folk and the hounds track Emmy down. Which is long enough to give the suspicious Mrs. Stanforth several exciting scenes of accusation and the mad girl as many scenes bordering on maniacal hysteria.

Impressive Acting

One thing Author Catto has provided, and that is a chance for the leading women in his play to act. Elsa Lanchester may occasionally overdo the paranoiac excitements of Emmy, but there is never a moment that she loses your interest entirely.

In many scenes, in fact, she has you tense and apprehensive before she takes your mind away from the mad girl she is pretending to be and brings it back to the clever actress her training, and perhaps her life as Charles Laughton's observing wife, has made her.

Playing opposite Miss Lanchester is the Carol Goodner who came over to play the actress siren in "The Man Who Came to Dinner" and stayed on to add a bit of flesh to the pleasing Goodner person and acquire a Broadway reputation.

Miss Goodner, who had this same role in the London production, matches scene for scene with Miss Lanchester. Between them they will give all devotees of the shiver and shake drama a completely satisfying run for their money.

The supporting performances are placid by contrast, but nicely capable. A solid and many-angled setting by Lemuel Ayers is not the least of the drama's assets.

The direction by Berthold Viertel is also well planned and executed. Last night's audience was plainly pleased.

"They Walk Alone"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, *March 13, 1941*

Elsa Lanchester Seen In "They Walk Alone"

By JOHN MASON BROWN

CHARLES LAUGHTON'S over-acting in "The Beachcomber," which some of us hoped never to see topped, must be pointed to now as a fine example of understatement. At least it must, when compared to the performance Elsa Lanchester is giving at the Golden these nights in an English melodrama known as "They Walk Alone."

Miss Lanchester is playing a servant girl who is a homicidal maniac. Not for one-half second does she let anyone forget that fact. Visually she keeps running the gamut from Baby Snooks to Ophelia, and from Mrs. Rochester to King Lear. Janus could not make more faces than Miss Lanchester manages to make simultaneously.

Although she remembers to go about her domestic duties, Miss Lanchester's mind is plainly not on her work about the house. She has an acting job to do which she proceeds to over-do on an epic scale. From the moment of her first entrance she fools no one as to her insanity except the foolish people who employ her. She is stage-mad in the biggest, most conscientious, and embarrassing way you ever saw. She sways. She simpers. She rolls her eyes. She giggles nervously. She leers. She screeches insults. She thrusts herself forward as a demented temptress.

And in general she carries on as if she were determined to turn the whole of Bedlam into a one-woman show.

Mad Indeed

Commendable as is Miss Lanchester's industry and skillful though she can be as an actress the results are not happy in "They Walk Alone." Of course there is a man offstage at the Golden who labors almost as unstintingly as does Miss Lanchester. He is the man who keeps making those strange noises in the wings which he wants us to believe come from the throat of a huge dog who is growling near the house when he is not howling on the nearby moor. Then the thunder machine and the wind machine are kept busy, too. And so is the offstage organ upon which Miss Lanchester is supposed to play in the small hours of the night just before committing one of her many sex murders.

Perhaps all this hocus-pocus could be forgiven in the interest of good gory sport if only Miss Lanchester did in the right people in "They Walk Alone." But it is Max Catto's perverse whim as the author of this melodrama to have her murder mainly such villagers as have not appeared, when it is the onstage characters, who spend so much time talking dully, that are the ones you hope to see quickly slaughtered.

There is only one of these who awakens your slumbering sense of mercy. This is the mother. If she is an exception, it is because she is played by Carol Goodner, who is manifestly an actress of genuine distinction. It would be unfair to blame her for Mr. Catto's playwriting.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, *March 13, 1941*

Murder in Earnest

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

THERE is something curiously appealing about a murder drama that takes homicide seriously once again. After all of the plays that have regarded assassination as a lark there is comfort in the sight of a slayer who is supposed to be evil and dangerous rather than the funniest fellow in town. It is, therefore, with a sort of relief, which seems ungrateful to such good shows as "Arsenic and Old Lace" and "Mr. and Mrs. North," that one approaches so earnest-minded a horror tale as "They Walk Alone." This English importation, in which Miss Elsa Lanchester, wife of the eminent Mr. Charles Laughton, is homicidal all over the place, at least take its crimes with becoming seriousness. The only trouble is that it is also pretty tame stuff.

* * *

That, however, assuredly is not Miss Lanchesters' fault. There is quite a bit of pungent ham in little Mrs. Laughton, but, like her husband, she mixes it abundantly with talent, with results that can be properly chilling at the best of times. In "They Walk Alone" Miss Lanchester is an eerie Cornish girl who has a way with the men. It seems that her misfortune is that she is likewise something of a Puritan. So when the foolish males of the narrative make their advances to the prim but kittenish little maid called Emmy, she is so shocked that there is nothing for her to do but strangle them. There is also a whisper about mutilation or something, but the play is dutifully reticent concerning that. Anyway, on moonlit nights, when the church organ plays its wistful music, Emmy begins her massacres.

* * *

One objection I have to the play by Max Catto is that the killings take place offstage. Another is that not enough members of the cast are the victims of Emmy's ministrations. I could have selected at least one other for her. But she is quite a busy girl as she prowls about in her ominous way, luring men to their doom and arousing the suspicions only of the sensible Bess Stanforth. There is one highly effective scene wherein Emmy and Bess confront each other menacingly, and here we have the horror drama in one of its best phases. For most of the time, though, "They Walk Alone" is too elementary, obvious and undramatic in its terrors, contenting itself with being a modest distaff version of "Night Must Fall," in much too desultory a fashion.

* * *

Miss Lanchester has the most effective role and she plays it with shrewd and resourceful effectiveness, but by far the best performance of the play is that contributed by Miss Carol Goodner. Miss Goodner, who created the part of the predatory actress in "The Man Who Came to Dinner" last season, is the wholesome and sensible Bess, who sees through the pseudo-ingenuous exterior of little Emmy and thereby arouses the wrath of that wistfully homicidal lady. Playing with straightforwardness, honesty and striking skill, the refugee from Alexander Woollcott contributes a characterization of quiet and authoritative power. The rest of the players are serviceable or a little less. Neither as a pathological character study nor a horror tale is "They Walk Alone" sufficiently sturdy.

Reprinted from
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
March 13, 1941

Elsa Lanchester Opens in English Murder Play

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

THEY WALK ALONE, an English melodrama featuring Charles Laughton's wife, Elsa Lanchester, in the role of a murderess, is a page out of Krafft-Ebing, saturated in the atmosphere of The Hound of the Baskervilles. It misses fire for a variety of reasons, but chiefly because it is illogical, amateurishly manufactured and—save as a police blotter entry—unimportant even if true.

The unvarnished details of Max Catto's play are that a Cornish servant girl obtains a position with an honest farmer's family near Lincoln, and sneaks into a nearby chapel each midnight to play the organ. The experience first stimulates her libido and then her impulse to murder. Four or five of the town's best young men are thus put out of the way before she is trapped at her midnight musicales.

The major flaw in Mr. Catto's story is obvious. Emmy Bandine (Miss Lanchester) could not remain in any normal household five minutes before her maniac-depressive tendencies would be noted and she would be hauled off to whatever they have in Lincoln that corresponds to the psychopathic ward at Bellevue.

A second and equally serious flaw is that as played by Miss Lanchester Emmy Baudine would have repelled rather than attracted any male with half a brain, and that even before she had a chance to exercise her dubious wiles she would have been discharged for insolence, insubordination and immorality.

Mr. Catto made liberal use of such claptrap as thunderstorms, howling dogs, banging doors and eerie English moors to intensify the drama, but they were of no avail.

As for Miss Lanchester's victims, I was delighted that she succeeded in doing away with Martin Manulis, and I rather hoped she'd get Erford Gage as well, but you can't have everything.

Carol Goodner was the one redeeming light on the stage at John Golden's Theater. She played sincerely and rationally.

We have much better murders in Brooklyn than they have in Lincoln.

CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS

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Place this week's reviews with preceding weekly reviews so as to have always an up to date file of the New York Stage.

"They Walk Alone"

Reprinted from
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
March 13, 1941

More Horrible Than Horrifying

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

A NEW horror play came to town last night, but I'm afraid that nobody was very much horified. The author, to be sure, was full of ideas. A dog kept howling on the backstage moors. The church organ played eerily in the middle of the night. There was rain and wind; there was thunder and lightning. Four village lads met horrible offstage deaths, and the servant girl who did them in moved menacingly around a farmhouse for three acts before a posse got her.

There's nothing wrong about these ingredients, even if there is obviously nothing new. Perhaps it's a slight handicap to dish up most of the horror somewhere out on the moors instead of nearer the footlights. But the trouble goes deeper. The trouble lies in a great lack of suspense; in a repetition of incidents; in a disregard for pace; and above all, in the creature named Emmy who does all the murdering.

Emmy's is a big part—so big that, if you take a fancy view of *They Walk Alone*, you might consider it chiefly a character study. Emmy is given to dramatizing herself; to menacing attitudes and gestures and stances; now to acting the slut, now to acting a slut's idea of a great lady. Emmy lies and is caught out, shows bravado and breaks down, indulges in orgies of hatred and floods of self-pity and spasms of fear.

But there are two things the matter with Emmy. One is that for all her fandangoes, she is never motivated or explained, and is accordingly just an ordinary homicidal maniac. Ordinary homicidal maniacs are fine in plays when somebody has to be murdered; other wise—except in *Arsenic and Old Lace*—they are bores.

The second thing the matter with Emmy is Elsa Lanchester, who plays her. Granted that Emmy is keen on acting up, she needn't act up quite so much or so lusciously as Miss Lanchester does. In an effort to be brief, I can only say that last night Miss Lanchester executed some *pas seuls* unknown even to ballet, and made use of muscles that even great athletes get along without.

In contrast to this, Carol Goodner played Emmy's pursuer with real skill and force. Olive Deering was also very good in a smaller role, and the others struggled along fairly well, not much helped by the direction.

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THEATRE REVIEWS

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, *March 13, 1941*

Elsa Lanchester Acts Leading Part in Former London Drama, Max Catto's 'They Walk Alone'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

TEN years ago Elsa Lanchester acted here with her husband, Charles Laughton, in "Payment Deferred." Although this department has only the dimmest recollections of her acting then, it has very vivid recollections just now of her acting in Max Catto's "They Walk Alone," which was put on at the John Golden last evening. Cast as a singularly unprepossessing maniac in a wholly superfluous drama, she describes a character with extraordinary versatility in a free-hand style.

She is Emmy Baudine, a servant girl on a farm near Lincoln, England—very obliging around the house, a fanatical murderer away from home. To say that she has a dual personality is to be mathematically modest. Emmy runs the full range of characteristics from affability and companionship to savage insanity. Taking the author at his word, Miss Lanchester acts the part with enormous descriptive detail in a fury of conflicting emotions.

* * *

To this theatregoer her Emmy is like a remarkably complex portrait pinned on the wall. It is something to be admired for its brilliant workmanship in a mood of detachment. For "They Walk Alone," which was done in London two seasons ago, is one of those silly little pieces of gratuitous sensation that are whipped up in a vacuum. Almost any one in the audience at the end of the first scene knows that Emmy is cracked in the conk. At the end of the first act every one without exception must know that she is dangerous. But until the last act only one character in the play knows that Emmy is murdering young men all over the place and running over to the chapel at night to play the church organ. Even in the last scene one character in the play is still suffering a mind-lag.

Possibly Miss Lanchester's acting helps to give the essential mystery of the drama away before the evening is fairly started. The exactitude of detail in her acting in the first scene is explicit enough to give away "Arsenic and Old Lace" and "Mr. and Mrs. North" together. But it would be impossible for any actress to impose much on a play like "They Walk Alone," for Mr. Catto lacks subtlety to an alarming degree. If the farmers of England are not quicker-witted than the characters of his drama, some one should start an immediate movement to repeal the "lease-lend" bill.

* * *

In addition to Miss Lanchester, "They Walk Alone" offers Carol Goodner, who gives an excellent performance in a part she played in the London production. The farmers of England do seem to be under petticoat rule, but as long as Miss Goodner wears the petticoats this department will understand. Martin Manulis gives a conspicuously good performance as a farmer with a level head, and Olive Deering has her moments as a young lady of occasional spirit. Under Berthold Viertel's direction, the performance as a whole is hardly more than adequate to the occasion.

For the occasion is one that Miss Lanchester has seized on to display a sharply drawn portrait of a homicidal maniac. Nothing in the drama is as adroit, imaginative and vivid as her acting.

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, *March 13, 1941*

'They Walk Alone,' British Scare Drama, Is Offered at the Golden

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

FOR people who are obviously pretty hard to scare, the English are singularly addicted to make-believe horrors. Give them a theater piece about a loony housemaid who murders on the moors, accompanying herself on the village pipe organ, and they become shiveringly ecstatic. Max Catto gave them that in "They Walk Alone," at any rate, and, according to report, blood curdled violently in London.

"They Walk Alone" has now been transplanted to the John Golden Theater, where it opened last night. Miss Elsa Lanchester, with many a mad laugh and wildly rolling eyes, is Emmy the exterminator. She enters the farmhouse of the Tallents near Lincoln, England, and the countryside is soon heaped with the corpses of young men. Emmy is like that. When a young man makes love to her she simply has to kill him. After murder, or perhaps it is before, she dotes on a bit of music and sneaks into the village church to practice on its pipe organ. What with finding corpses everywhere, and being kept awake half the night by organ music, the Tallents and their friends have a difficult time of it.

Possibly I have already given away too much of Mr. Catto's play, although I have given away no more than becomes pretty apparent within five minutes after the curtain rises. So you will not learn here whether they catch Emmy or whether Emmy catches any of the characters about whose safety you may become concerned. It is possible that curiosity may augment your terror if you go to the Golden. It is my impression that your terror will need all the augmenting it can get.

These matters are too subjective for accurate analysis. Maybe "The Walk Alone" is as horrifying as the author intended. But this correspondent was not unduly alarmed, being unable to believe in most of it. Confronted by so obvious a menace as Emmy any reasonable household would, I think, immediately call the constable. Mr. Catto and Miss Lanchester both pile it on until it toppies over; until it becomes merely a wholehearted young actress making awful faces and odd, mad sounds while other actors pretend not to notice anything out of the way and are terribly surprised when the truth comes out.

Miss Carol Goodner and A. P. Kaye stand up to Miss Lanchester very well indeed and the others are properly disturbed and unsuspecting. There are some good thunder effects, but the production needs a new dog howl, and its off-stage motor car sounds are by no means adequate.

"The Doctor's Dilemma"

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, *March 12, 1941*

The Doctor's Dilemma Magnificently Played

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

THE significance of George Bernard Shaw's wickedly witty lampoon on the medical profession, The Doctor's Dilemma, has faded to some extent in the 35 years since its first production, and some of its crusading bitterness has disappeared along with it. What remains (unless one is passionately devoted to the cause of socialized medicine) is a satirical comedy exquisitely written and, in the hands of Miss Katharine Cornell's company, magnificently played.

Here is a revival, it seems to me, that should make history. The cast, headed by Miss Cornell and directed by Guthrie McClintic, is as impressive as a list of stars gathered together, let us say, in behalf of Hundles for Britain. In character it is thoroughly British—as it should be in view of Shaw's theme—and in quality it cannot be matched by any group now playing in America.

I do not know, nor do I much care, what reasons lay behind Miss Cornell's decision to revive the Shaw play at this particular time. But if it were only to serve as a rendezvous for all the British talent now in this country, that is reason enough. A roll call would show practically everybody present but Sir Cedric Hardwicke.

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As her choice for the five medical men who wrangled over the treatment of a rascally and consumptive artist until he blundered into death, Miss Cornell brought in Raymond Massey as Sir Colenso Ridgeon, Clarence Derwent as Dr. Schutzmacher, Whitford Kane as Sir Patrick Cullen, Ralph Forbes as Mr. Cutler Walpole and Cecil Humphreys as Sir Ralph Bloomfield Bonington. Bramwell Fletcher played Louis Dubedat, the artist, with impish delight rather than sardonic humor, and Miss Cornell enjoyed a quiet triumph as Jennifer Dubedat.

Miss Cornell's appearance is, after all, decidedly unselfish. This is not a commanding role. It is a sketch rather than a three-dimensional figure, and her appearances are for the most part brief and fleeting. There is some opportunity for emotional display in the third act, but otherwise the opportunities for demonstration of her power are infrequent. Shaw was more interested in caricaturing the doctors than in rounding out his picture of a woman.

In those moments she was on the stage, nevertheless, Miss Cornell gave an exhibition of exceptional restraint. She suggested, and made felt, the tremendous reservoir of power lying within the character of Mrs. Dubedat. And she was quite as beautiful as ever.

Without in the least detracting from Raymond Massey's studied and technically excellent portrayal of Ridgeon, it seems to me that honors—perhaps a knighthood—should go to Cecil Humphreys for his humorous and human handling of the role of Bloomfield Bonington. This was a masterful characterization, carrying with it all the absurdities, the fatuousness, the stubborn ignorance and, by contrast, the mawkish sentiment Shaw stuffed into the shirt of the physician.

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Ralph Forbes, returning to the stage from the flesh-pots of the West Coast after 13 years, also gave an excellent performance of Mr. Cutler Walpole (they call surgeons "Mr." over there to distinguish them from mere general practitioners), the surgeon who believed that the cure for all human ills was the slicing off a certain useless sac that Mother Nature planted in all men for no particular purpose. Mr. Kane was delightfully at home in the person of the somewhat wiser, but unfortunately retired, physician who believed nothing at all.

Clarence Derwent, as Dr. Schutzmacher, had one good scene, in which he carried on superbly, quietly and with effective reserve. And Colin Keith-Johnston was marvelously humble and pathetic as Dr. Blenkinsop.

The third act death scene of the scoundrelly artist was once regarded as a beautifully expressive indictment of modern pharisees who would insist that genius obey their petty laws and conventions. In Mr. Fletcher's ordinarily adept hands I found it more cynical than beautiful, and full of sly hypocrisy. All the minor characters, and particularly Emmy, as played by Alice Belmore Cliffe, were admirably done.

Donald Oenslager's settings, especially the terrace at the Star and Garter, which was miraculously beautiful, were perfect, and on the whole we are not likely to see such a distinguished revival in many years. Make a note of The Doctor's Dilemma in your engagement book and underscore it.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, *March 12, 1941*

Cornell and Massey Appear in a Revival of Bernard Shaw's 'The Doctor's Dilemma'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

ALTHOUGH the part of Jennifer is almost infinitesimal in Shaw's "The Doctor's Dilemma," it is enough to prove that Katharine Cornell is a great actress. Whenever she appears, this skittish and garrulous drama comes to attention for a moment and communicates genuine emotion. There is something magnetically genuine about her; it pulls Mr. Shaw's capricious gabble together and rouses the interest of the audience.

Realizing, perhaps, the infirmities of an aging drama, Miss Cornell and Mr. McClintic have taken pains to cast it with good actors. They have retrieved Mr. Massey from the idleness that has pursued him since he relinquished Lincoln many months ago, and they have assembled Bramwell Fletcher, Clarence Derwent, Whitford Kane, Cecil Humphreys, Colin Keith-Johnston and Ralph Forbes in a notable cast. With settings by Donald Oenslager and costumes by the ingenious Motleys, this revival puts some excellent actors to work at the Shubert, where they went crisply through their paces last evening. As some one says in "The Country Wife," "I liked hugeously the actors, but I was a-weary of the play."

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Let's look at it as a device for giving Miss Cornell a part that is respectable. At first glance, "The Doctor's Dilemma" is not promising. It is a man's play, crowded with fatuous doctors and a fascinating artist, and the part of Jennifer, the artist's wife, is strictly subordinate to pages of iconoclastic conversation. But apart from size it is a good role for Miss Cornell, for it is romantic, sincere and womanly. It is Candida on a smaller scale under less comfortable circumstances.

What Miss Cornell does to it probably involves enormous skill and craftsmanship. But what you are likely to think in the theatre is that she is extraordinarily beautiful in costumes that happen to become her, and that by nature she is a rich and glowing woman. After the doctors have talked shop glibly in the opening scene, discrediting the medical profession and making fools out of the human race in general, Miss Cornell steps in quietly and suddenly "The Doctor's Dilemma" becomes a crusade for the life of a talented artist. It would be too much to say that she redeems the play completely. The part is too brief for a miracle of that magnitude. But it is long enough to renew an old conviction that Miss Cornell is a great actress because she is endowed with spirit and fine perception.

As a play about thirty-five years of age, "The Doctor's Dilemma" is better than most of its contemporaries. Mr. Shaw's familiar habit of looking upon men and women as human beings results in some witty satire about the pretentions of men of medicine who pass for gods in a society that has no way of applying a check to their murderous ignorance. But his attack upon medicine is pretty well mixed up with his congential satire of middle-class morality. In cutting the text, Mr. McClintic has lopped off some of Mr. Shaw's temperamental peccadilloes, notably his gibes at himself and his quotations from his neighbor of that time, Barrie. It is a witty play, crinkling with common sense, but, O Lord, how it runs on! Only a man with an electric constitution can listen to every word of it.

• • •

Mr. Massey is also a good actor. Attired in the formal coat of an expensive medico, he plays with conviction and good-nature, and also with the modesty of a man who does not intrude upon the prerogatives of the other characters. As the blackguard artist, Bramwell Fletcher gives an excellent performance. Clarence Derwent speaks his lines with a humorous polish that makes them count. Cecil Humphreys is enormously alive and comic as an imposing humbug. All the other actors in a meticulously directed performance bring their assorted characters to life, not forgetting the impertinent slattern acted by Alice Belmore Cliffe.

As work relief for one superb actress and a keen gallery of worthy associates "The Doctor's Dilemma" has many virtues. If only Shaw would stop talking about his characters and do something with them! After the final curtain this playgoer overheard one disgruntled comment in the lobby: "What's Shaw got against doctors? He never eats anything, does he?"

"The Doctor's Dilemma"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, *March 12, 1941*

Miss Cornell Revives 'The Doctor's Dilemma' at the Shubert Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

"THE DOCTOR'S DILEMMA" dates back to those happy days when Bernard Shaw was still in flower and could scatter witty comment over human affairs with never a thought that epigrams should be husbanded for a rainy day. "The Doctor's Dilemma" is thus an excellent play for Miss Katharine Cornell, who is in full flower at this very moment, to revive at the Shubert Theater. Since Miss Cornell did just that last evening, this will be more celebration than review.

At the Shubert everything is now as it should be. The play sparkles and the acting glows. Wit is effortless and acting points the wit. A cast, which would make an "all-star" listing, plays as "all star" casts so seldom manage to play. Through the long, but never too long, evening the impertinent observations of Bernard Shaw the Younger crackle as they crackled long ago, when the world still could spare the time for light-hearted satire and Shaw himself was still a wicked informer against the absurdities of convention.

In "The Doctor's Dilemma," of course, he turned himself loose on the medical profession. He collected a classic group of well-thought of practitioners and poked them full of holes. He revealed Mr. Cutler Walpole, who had his pet operation; Sir Ralph Bloomfield Bonington, whose dream was to "stimulate the phagocytes" and whose conversation consisted exclusively of the best bromides; Dr. Blenkinsop, who relied on prunes, and Sir Patrick Cullen, who was convinced that all important discoveries had been made several times before. And there was, of course, Sir Colenso Ridgeon, who had a new formula for combating tuberculosis.

Shaw dissected these gentlemen at leisure before he went on to his play, which was concerned with the amoral, brilliant artist, Louis Dubedat, and his charming, devoted wife, Jennifer. Sir Colenso had to decide, you will remember, whether to save the life of Louis or that of the faithful Dr. Blenkinsop and finally contrived the dispatch of Louis so that Jennifer would never find him out. Shaw found time for delightful dissertations on art and morals in the course of this; time to flicker, as he used to do, over a dozen associated problems. There are flaws in the play now and then; changes of mood are abrupt at times and here and there the passage of time has made some of the wit seem a little obvious. But the play, essentially, is as fresh and stimulating as it always was.

The part of Jennifer, played by Miss Cornell, is a somewhat passive one, but Miss Cornell does not need dominating roles. She makes Jennifer warm and glowing and convinces you that, if Jennifer is obviously a little foolish, she is still worth all the trouble every one takes with her. And once or twice, when the moment comes, Miss Cornell's acting has that electrifying quality which is peculiarly hers. Raymond Massey as Sir Colenso acts with a fine cutting edge, sharpening the character and the play. Bramwell Fletcher plays Louis with the witty jauntiness Shaw must have intended; Cecil Humphreys makes the most of Sir Ralph and Whitford Kane is admirable as Sir Patrick—Mr. Kane is always admirable. Add Clarence Derwent, Colin Keith-Johnston, Leslie Barrie, Alice Belmore Cliffe and the rest to these and you have something. You have a completely satisfying play acted precisely as it should be. That is certainly something.

'THE DOCTOR'S DILEMMA'

Play by Bernard Shaw, arranged in three acts; staged by Guthrie McClintic; designed by Donald Oenslager; costumes by Motley; revived at the Shubert Theater on March 11, 1941, by Katharine Cornell. The cast:

Redpenny	Stanley Bell
Emmy	Alice Belmore Cliffe
Sir Colenso Ridgeon	Raymond Massey
Dr. Schutzmacher	Clarence Derwent
Sir Patrick Cullen	Whitford Kane
Mr. Cutler Walpole	Ralph Forbes
Sir Ralph Bloomfield Bonington	Cecil Humphreys
Dr. Blenkinsop	Colin Keith-Johnston
Jennifer Dubedat	Katharine Cornell
Louis Dubedat	Bramwell Fletcher
Minnie Tinwell	Margaret Curtis
The Newspaper Man	Leslie Barrie
A Secretary	David Orrick

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, *March 12, 1941*

Doctors at Bay

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

MR. SHAW'S celebrated sneer at the medical profession remains surprisingly alive after all of these years. Never one of the great man's most distinguished plays, "The Doctor's Dilemma" might have seemed just the sort of work that would show its age with particular conclusiveness. The great progress of medicine since the beginning of the century might well have proved to offer a retort to it of an especially devastating nature. But perhaps so many recent books about the wonder and the glory of the doctor's profession have tended to weary us, and Mr. Shaw's rebuttal on the subject is therefore revived at an auspicious moment.

Perhaps it is merely that the Shavian brilliance doesn't perish as readily as many may have feared. Anyway, in Miss Katharine Cornell's splendidly acted new production, "The Doctor's Dilemma" once more proves a provocative and satisfying comedy.

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You will doubtless remember that Mr. Shaw, in a splendid blanket indictment, denounced the medical profession for quackery, ignorance, presumption, knavery, hypocrisy, stupidity and sundry incidental offenses. It was, he insisted, purely accidental when any patient got well, and both doctors and victims were lucky that there were any cures at all. In fact, he added, there probably wouldn't be any survivals of illness if nature didn't happen to be the one physician that knew anything. All of this was set down with such gay and witty malice that it remains of interest these decades later. But Shaw had many other things to say in "The Doctor's Dilemma." The credo of the artist, the frequently embarrassing difference between the artist and his works, the relative position of morality and genius and the entire matter of the creative urge are contemplated with evocative brilliance, and, although the dramatic structure of the comedy is unsteady, the substance is still delightful to listen to.

* * *

With all of the great surviving merits of the play, there are some stretches of it that might threaten dullness if the acting were not something exceptional. And, fortunately, that is just the sort of playing that the current revival of "The Doctor's Dilemma" offers. Miss Cornell is at her radiant best as the idealistically devoted wife of the snide artist, Louis Dubedat. That peculiar magic of hers is working in its most alluring fashion and, in the colorful costumes of the period, she not only looks lovely but plays with genuine fascination. As Sir Colenso Ridgeon, the doctor of the dilemma, Raymond Massey is splendid, acting the important role with discretion, intelligence and striking insight. If there had been any suspicion that Mr. Massey was destined to be remembered only as Abraham Lincoln his fine performance in the Shaw play would prove that he is no one-role star.

* * *

As Dubedat, that far from rare combination of artist and scoundrel, Bramwell Fletcher has one of the great speeches of the modern theater, and he manages it and the other requirements of the part with ease and success. There is a particularly effective performance by Cecil Humphreys as the most fraudulent of the doctors Shaw pillories, and Ralph Forbes is helpful as his runner-up in inefficiency. As one of the more sympathetic of the medicos, Whitford Kane appears with his customary engaging skill. Clarence Derwent handles the excellent speeches of the Jewish doctor with understanding, and Colin Keith-Johnston is properly in character as the worthy and ailing physician Ridgeon cures in place of Dubedat. Smaller roles are particularly well handled by Miss Alice Belmore Cliffe, Miss Margaret Curtis and Leslie Barrie, the last as Shaw's contemptuously drawn newspaper man. The settings by Donald Oenslagen and the costumes by Motley are of enormous help. "The Doctor's Dilemma" still is good, lively fun, with Shavian wisdom tossed in.

"The Doctor's Dilemma"

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'Doctor's Dilemma' Revived by Cornell

For All Its Defects, Shavian Piece Is One That Holds the Ear With Style, Wit and Vigor of Its Dialogue

By JOHN ANDERSON

IN A clairvoyant moment in 1906, Bernard Shaw described Katharine Cornell as she looked last night at the Shubert Theatre when, with Raymond Massey and an excellent cast, she presented "The Doctor's Dilemma," and played eloquently and beautifully the lovely Jennifer Dubedat. She had, as Mr. Shaw specified, "something of the grace and romance of a wild creature, with a good deal of the elegance and dignity of a fine lady," and so added a third Shavian heroine, "tall, slender and strong," to the gallery already brilliantly graced by her Candida and St. Joan. She and her company make Mr. Shaw's somewhat scattered and overlong, but still fascinating attack on the doctors one of the events of a season that gains at once in force and distinction.

Since the play was done by the Theatre Guild as recently as 1927 with Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne, it is bound to provoke comparison and there are things to be said on one side and on the other.

The comparison, in this case, cannot be exact because Miss Cornell's production has shifted the emphasis a little by casting Mr. Massey not as Dubedat, the part played unforgettably by Mr. Lunt, but as Sir Colenso Ridgeon, the scientific villain of the piece.

Ideally, I suppose, the play should have three equally powerful performances, perfectly balanced and sustained. There is no doubt that the celebrated death scene emerged with higher flourish and deeper tragedy when Mr. Lunt lay a-dying in the luxuriance of Mr. Shaw's superbly defiant credo of art. But I suspect that while this single, and certainly central scene lacks the glitter and magnificence of the Guild performance the present production comes closer to the author's bristling mockery.

About Doctors

For it is a play chiefly about doctors, not the Dubedats. Like many of Mr. Shaw's plays, it wants cutting and drastic editing. (I was surprised to see that they got away with changing "greengages" to "prunes"). Its opening act is far too long, the dinner scene on the terrace seems somewhat offside, and the ending almost haphazard and abrupt.

Yet for all these defects it is a play that holds the ear with the style and wit and unfaltering vigor of its dialogue. Its verbal jetwork is like a geyser in a theatre that had seemed a dust bowl of Broadway writing. For here is the sound of ideas being clipped off in brilliants by a master of the craft of speech.

Here is the vitality of sheer talk and full ranging mind and daring posture. It is something to see the stage take on the scale of its natural imagination. It is something to see Shaw, with a grain of truth in his wrong-headedness, a little wisdom and a sort of cantankerous compassion, put the drama back in long pants. It is, in fact, a relief.

By all the rules of debate, this is no starring vehicle, and Miss Cornell refuses to distort the play by undue emphasis. Her performance is subtly-pitched and beautifully wrought. Her scenes with Sir Colenso were touchingly eloquent, and her quiet simplicity as she moved to cover the body of Dubedat at the end of Act IV evoked superbly the tragical power that Mr. Shaw releases for an instant and wipes out with a descending curtain.

Massey's Role

As Sir Colenso, Mr. Massey makes his first stage appearance since his celebrated Lincoln and proves an admirable Shavian, his vocal inflections wry enough to match the sardonic urbanity of his performance. It is a smart portrait, done with cleverly strokes and always effective.

Certainly one of the fattest parts and fattest heads in "The Doctor's Dilemma" belong to "B. B." Shaw's own abbreviation for a character otherwise identified under the stupefying name of Sir Ralph Bloomfield Bonington.

As B. B. Cecil Humphreys is altogether delightful, and he makes the long speeches of incorrect quotations and dreary platitudes (in which he is always forgetting what he is trying to say) immensely amusing. Whitford Kane is admirable as Sir Patrick and Colin Keith-Johnston (in spite of a too emphatic costume) gives poor Blenkinsop a real illumination.

Though he is an able actor with many performances to his credit Bramwell Fletcher seemed unable to give Dubedat the stature and force that the part demands. He caught the impishness of Shaw's artist without the violence of conviction and power that must go with it.

Motley's period costumes for Miss Cornell seemed, with one green exception, enough to knock your eyes out and Mr. Oenslager's settings scored two out of three.

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Shaw's Satire Is Like His Beard—Neat But Long

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

MISS CORNELL and Mr. Massey are with us again after a fairly long absence, and so is Shaw—the *real* Shaw—after an even longer one. Not since *Heartbreak House* in 1938 has anything of his been revived on Broadway.

The Doctor's Dilemma is, to be sure, something less than first-rate, but it contains a good many first-rate things. It contains a first-rate character—which, I need hardly add, is not the one impersonated by either Miss Cornell or Mr. Massey. It contains some first-rate dialogue, and a couple of first-rate scenes, and a first-rate ending. And to quality it adds abundance, tossing in enough ideas, themes and theses for several plays.

Possibly *The Doctor's Dilemma* reads better than it acts, even when it is acted (as it was last night) with skill and gusto. What is static and speech-ridden in the play becomes emphasized on the stage, and its form—which is based on the intermingling of ideas rather than the forwarding of action—seems less happy there.

As for the contents, the satire on the medical profession has worn least well. Though its exposure of medical humbug and fashionable quacks still has its points, the whole thing is a much too protracted joke, much of it limp W. S. Gilbert rather than lively G. B. Shaw.

Play Gets Going

But after the over-long first act, the play gets going. Ridgeon is faced with his dilemma: whether to save the life of a good man or a blackguardly genius. Shaw sees to it that this is no goody-goody problem in morality, by having Ridgeon very much in love with the genius's wife. And Ridgeon promptly rationalizes the matter: he decides that Dubedat's death would be all for the best, since in no other way could his doting wife retain her illusions about him.

Meanwhile the dying Dubedat has, in effect, taken over the play, giving it all its magnificent counterpoint. It is Dubedat who makes *The Doctor's Dilemma* breathe rather than merely scintillate.

Mr. McClintic's direction is for the most part excellent. Now and then he can't limber up scenes—but who could?—in which too many people, doing too much talking, are draped all over the stage. Miss Cornell's part is relatively small and fairly idealized: she plays a sort of perfect wife. She plays it, as she should, quietly and sensitively, with inward rather than outward feeling. I have never been able to go into ecstasies over Miss Cornell's acting, which for my tastes is often too tremulous and too mannered; but last night she seemed as charming as she looked.

In the somewhat priggish Ridgeon, Mr. Massey has a fairly tough assignment, which I don't think he altogether licked. In the first act he seemed stiff in his own right rather than in Ridgeon's; but he gained in ease thereafter, and was admirable in the final scene.

Dubedat, of course, is the best part in the play; and Bramwell Fletcher played him, now with a silky assurance, now with a taunting contempt, and at the last with a rebellious force that were remarkably effective. Several others in the cast deserve more praise than there is space to give them; I can only remark that Whitford Kane, Alice Belmore Cliffe, Cecil Humphreys and Clarence Durwent were all excellent.

"The Doctor's Dilemma"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, *March 12, 1941*

"The Doctor's Dilemma" Is a Handsome Revival by Cornell

"The Doctor's Dilemma," comedy by Bernard Shaw. Revived by Katharine Cornell at the Shubert Theatre, New York, March 11, 1941.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

THERE is something a little Springlike and refreshing in the Katharine Cornell revival of Bernard Shaw's "The Doctor's Dilemma" at the Shubert Theatre. It is good to hear the good gray philosopher chuckling again behind his old red beard.

It is good, too, to sit before so well staged and so handsomely directed a revival. It brings a taste of the older theatre back without belittling its dignity or dwarfing the stature it attained in its best years.

There are not many thirty-five-year-old plays with which even the McClintic-Cornell combination could do this. Shaw doesn't date perceptibly, save in the matter of costumes and settings.

Happily he was always a generation or two ahead of his time. His good-natured pillorying of the leading experimenters of the medical profession in 1906 is practically as incisive, and quite as amusing, as it would be today.

Still Useful

Substitute the current vitamin excitement for the old-time anti-toxin excitement and you have the basis for another doctors' dilemma. And pages of ready made jibes, tipped with cynicism and stinging wit ready to paste in any script.

The Dubedats are still an average couple of frustrated humans demanding satisfying answers as to the meanings of life and morals.

There will always be Jennifer Dubedats to fight loyally for the lives of their waster husbands. And always talented, weak-willed and morally deficient Louis Dubedats to accept wives' sacrifices with the excuse that after all they were happy in their miseries, so to speak. Romantic martyrdom will never be the least of satisfactions.

The last New York revival of "The Doctor's Dilemma" was that made by the Theatre Guild in November, 1927, with Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne playing the Dubedats.

When the Lunts Played

This must have thrown the comedy a little out of balance, though I do not recall that it did. With Lunt as the sympathetic victim of the calculating Sir Colenso Ridgeon's decision to save another man's life in place of his, audience reaction must have been less definitely favorable to the satire and cynicism of the present revival.

Now we have Raymond Massey playing Ridgeon with admirable austerity and just a touch of wishful hoping in the romantic line, while Bramwell Fletcher laughs gayly, cynically and engagingly through the role of Louis.

As a result Louis' death scene skirts the edge of comedy and the last scene, with Jennifer and Ridgeon exchanging compliments in the art gallery, is chilled and properly Shavian in its lack of sentiment.

Miss Cornell Is Generous

Miss Cornell is gorgeously arrayed in a blue velvet creation of the early nineteen hundreds in this scene, and that provides a nice picture at the close.

All the performances are excellent. Cecil Humphreys revels in the role of Sir Ralph Bonington, the pompous but porous one. Ralph Forbes, maturing gracefully, comes east to play a forceful and interesting Walpole, the lightly daft representative of surgery as a cure-all. Clarence Derwent has an effective moment as a Jewish specialist.

Whitford Kane is a perfect Sir Patrick, the universal anchor man of a profession that always needs a lot of them. Colin Keith-Johnston plays a credible Blenkinsop without overplaying poverty's victim. And Alice Belmore Cliffe is a delightful Emmy, as she has been these many years.

Miss Cornell is gentle and persuasively satisfying as Jennifer and generous to a degree in turning the stage over to her carefully selected male cast. She manages, however, being the person and the artist that she is, to dominate the evening.

Donald Oenslager's settings are impressively pictorial and the Motley costuming is completely in the picture.

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Cornell and Massey in "The Doctor's Dilemma"

By JOHN MASON BROWN

THE most difficult task faced by a revival is lulling in those who have seen the play before all memories of an earlier production. If the revival is able not only to survive but to supplant these treacherous memories, it may claim to have passed the acid test. It is this test which in most respects was passed last night by Katharine Cornell's immensely satisfying presentation of "The Doctor's Dilemma."

More than thirteen years have slipped by since Mr. Shaw's tragi-comedy at the expense of the medicos has been seen hereabouts. Then it was the Theatre Guild which staged it with a capable cast headed by Lynn Fontanne and Alfred Lunt. But agreeable as the recollections of that production have remained through the seasons, it is in only one respect (and then chiefly in one scene) that last night's revival fails to replace its predecessor.

Bramwell Fletcher's Louis Dubedat compels one to think back to Mr. Lunt's. It is passable enough in its introductory acts, although even here it is too light for full comfort. Where it is truly disappointing is in the famous death scene, the scene which Shaw wrote to prove to William Archer his ability to deal with the dying. When Mr. Fletcher comes to utter the lyric beauties of Dubedat's credo as an artist, he surrenders to self-pity. He turns mawkish and speaks without that simple ecstasy, that flaming pride in the wonders of his talent which Mr. Lunt communicated with devastating effectiveness.

An Excellent Evening

Throughout the rest of a very good evening, however, the present production creates new memories instead of challenging old ones. Both as an actress and a manageress, Miss Cornell proves her wisdom and her skill. She has never looked more beautiful than she does in the charming period costumes Motley has designed for her as Jennifer. She acts with that radiance which is hers alone. She proves that the size of a part has nothing to do with the fascination it can possess in the playing. She is the irresistible woman, the woman who can "get around" the doctors, that Emmy, the old servant in the play, describes. Due to her even the final act in the art gallery ceases to be the anti-climax one remembers. It becomes a vital and moving part of the drama.

Miss Cornell is generosity itself with her fellow players. Plainly what matters to her is the good of the play rather than the length of the part. She has brought together an admirable company. Raymond Massey has shed the tall hat, the shawl, and the brooding look of Lincoln to make a gay Sir Colenso Ridgeon. If not quite as suave or colorful a one as was Baliol Holloway's, Mr. Massey's is at any rate a highly acceptable one. Clarence Derwent is a brilliant Dr. Schutzmacher; Cecil Humphreys a delightful Bonington; Colin Keith-Johnston a touching Blenkinsop; Whitford Kane a lovable Sir Patrick Cullen; Ralph Forbes a breezy Walpole; and Alice Belmore Cliffe a perfect Emmy.

The truth is that Miss Cornell's revival of "The Doctor's Dilemma" comes as a delight. Mr. McClintic has done on it one of his best jobs of direction. Mr. Oenslager has backed it with some of his most pleasing settings. And then, after all, there is the play itself.

The dilemma faced, of course, by Mr. Shaw's doctor is whether, when he is forced to choose between the two, he should decide to save a good little man of no distinction or an artist of high gifts who is lacking in all scruples. The resulting play, though to Mr. Shaw a tragedy, is one of the most amusing of his comedies. It is a hornet's nest buzzing with Shavian paradoxes and good-natured thrusts at the medical profession. It is very pleasant, indeed, to be privileged to sit before such a play and to enjoy such acting.